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FIRST DINE BI OLTA SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION MEMBERS TAKE OATH OF OFFICE

The first board members of the newly-formed Dine Bi Olta School Board Association took their oath of office on the last day of its first annual conference held March 30 to April 1 in Albuquerque, N.M.

Taking the oath of office were President Robert Black; Vice President Donovan Andy; Fernie Yazzie; Chester Claw; Eugene Guerito; Treva Roanhorse and Betsy Dennison.

During the Saturday meeting of the association, the association also approved its by-laws, plan of operation and strategic plan.

The association was formed with the passage of the Dine Sovereignty in Education Act in July 2005 by the Navajo Nation Council.

“What the Education Committee envisions is one school board organization that represents all B.I.A. schools and that this association will be strong in promoting issues for our schools,” Wallace Charley, Education Committee Vice Chairman, said during remarks.

Before the establishment of the Dine Bi Olta School Board Association, there were three school board associations on the Navajo Nation and coordination between the associations when it came to lobbying became problematic.

During remarks at the oath of office ceremony, Speaker Lawrence Morgan commended the Education Committee for their work to make changes to the Education Code.

“It was the Education Committee that worked long hours to get the legislation to the Council for the adoption of the Sovereignty in Education Act,” Speaker Morgan said. “The Navajo Nation has been at these crossroads many times in our history, and each time we have come to make adjustments that we need to strengthen our government and build on our goals as a people.”

The speaker further mentioned that the survival of the Navajo people is dependent on maintaining culture and language, especially in the face of problems with methamphetamines, diabetes, alcoholism and increasing crime rates.

During the conference, school board members had the opportunity to participate in workshops such as Development of Navajo Nation Adequate Yearly Progress Formula, Dangers of Meth in Navajo Nation, Navajo Language and Culture Standards, What Boards Need to Know About Title 10 and Education Experiences Through the Eyes of a Navajo Code Talker with Code Talker Samuel Tso.

The attendees also heard from Education Committee Chairperson Leonard Chee on the latest activities of the committee. For instance, since the committee cannot be in Washington D.C. everyday to lobby, the committee invested in a consultant to advocate in the best interest of the Navajo Nation.

Chee also requested participation by the schools in the testing for a Navajo-specific formula for Adequate Yearly Progress. A formula is currently being developed by the Navajo Nation Division of Education and the University of Colorado American Indian and Alaska Native Program.

“This is exciting - making changes,” Pauleen Billie, who was program director with the former-Navajo Area School Board Association, said. “There was concern but we support our government. We support our own people.

“ When our children see us work together, so will they. When our children see us change for the better, so will they. How they behave - we should not be surprised where they got it,” Billie said.

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